HARRY CHAUDOIR

Belgian Knighthood for Harry Chaudoir

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ROSIERE — Door County's Belgian community can now boast of its first Belgian knight.

Harry J. Chaudoir Jr., 50, received his citation as "Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold II" last week from the Belgian consul in Chicago.

Chaudoir said he was "excited" and "humbled" by the award.

Belgium's King Baudouin conferred knighthood on Chaudoir "in recognition of the many unselfish services you have rendered to the Belgian community in the Peninsula area and towards furthering of close ties between Belgium and the United States."

The award is among the three highest and is named in honor of King Leopold II, who ruled 1865-1906.

The official citation and a silver medal were sent by register mailed from the Belgian ambassador W. Van Cauwenberg and consul Jacques Melsen.

Chaudoir is the second Wisconsinite to be honored by the Belgian court. The first knighthood was conferred on the American consul to Belgium, Bob Buehman of Milwaukee.

"Very few" such awards are granted, Melsen said. He stressed the contributions Chaudoir made to "promoting relations" between the two countries.

Chaudoir works a small farm near Rosiere when he isn't reading meters for Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. He was recently re-elected president of the Peninsula Belgian-American Club, a post he has held since 1968.

He helped organize the first Belgian-American tour to Belgium. About 65 persons took that tour in 1972 and most stayed with relatives.

Chaudoir met third cousin Joseph Mottart, fourth cousin Rene Chaudoir and other relatives. They provided pictures and documents to confirm his relatives' immigration to the United States.

In 1974, 152 American Belgians joined the tour, and their number increased to 180 for the 1976 tour . In 1975, about 180 Belgian tourists and 60 musicians and dancers visited Northeastern Wisconsin. Another 180 Belgians are scheduled to arrive in Green Bay early next month for a 10-day tour.

Chaudoir's great-grandfather Justin settled in the Namur area near Green bay in 1873. Justin and his brothers started a feed mill in Brussels, and later Justin's son Eli (Chaudoir's grandfather) built Chaudoir's Dock and hauled feed and merchandise between the rural county and Green Bay.

Members of the Chaudoir clan can be found throughout Door, Kewaunee and Brown counties, with a few cousins spread out through Louisana and California.

Spurred by the tours, the Belgian-American Club's membership has increased to more than 200.

Among their activities, the club members refurbished the school built in Namur in 1894. The school was the first home of Abbot Bernard Pennings and the Norbertine Order.